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ABSTRACT

A followup study investigated radio listenership as ritualistic behavior, based on an initial study using the same set of questions. The hypothesis tested was that gratifications statements related to radio usage would produce similar and stable patterns, reflecting highly ritualistic orientations toward the medium. Subjects, 557 adults in a large urban area of the Western United States, were randomly surveyed by telephone and asked about demographics, media usage, and reactions to a selection of 14 uses and gratifications statements about radio. Replies were coded on a five-point scale, and results were compared with those of the initial study. Data analysis revealed many consistencies between the two sets of findings. Perceived helpfulness of radio news was most consistent, followed by number of hours of listening in the morning and afternoon. The greatest number of discrepancies involved the amount of attention paid to radio. Based on the second set of findings, radio audiences stressed entertainment in the morning, whereas local news was accented during the afternoon. Positive orientations toward radio news were based on its immediacy. In terms of radio as ritual, it could be acknowledged that listening regularity is symptomatic of ritual but not necessarily ritualistic. (References and tables of data are included.) (NKA)

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REPLICATING "PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF RADIO NEWS AND SOME USES AND GRATIFICATIONS"

by

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ABSTRACT

REPLICATING "PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF RADIO NEWS AND SOME USES AND GRATIFICATIONS"

To examine radio listenership as ritualistic behavior, a parallel random sample from the same area as an initial study was interviewed using the same questions. Statistical re-examination of the original study's results using the second sample affirmed that gratifications could be reduced to two stable dimensions of information and entertainment. Re-analysis also found that radio still relied on entertainment and immediate news, but that localness of that news also was important. This stability argued that radio listenership was likely to be highly ritualistic in nature.

REPLICATING "PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF RADIO NEWS AND SOME USES AND GRATIFICATIONS"

In a critique of uses and gratifications research, Messaris (1977) pointed out the need to focus less on single exposures to mass media and more on examining the cumulative relations between audience and media. This latter orientation is important because, as Rubin (1984) has noted, much media use is ritualistic, a habit rather than an instrumental selection. As a habit, media use would be expected to produce relatively stable and predictable orientations toward mass media. Most uses and gratifications research, however, has not supported this contention.

When Blumler (1979) reviewed uses and gratifications research, he concluded that the findings could be grouped into the three broad areas of surveillance of the surrounding environment, diversion from it, and personal identity, a form of interaction between audience and media. However, subsequent research in television, newspaper, and radio has not affirmed this tripartite distinction.

In terms of television, Palmgreen (1985) reported strong support for surveillance, little support for diversion, and virtually no support for personal identity. Some of the difficulty in this area might be attributable to audiences selecting specific programs, but both Bantz (1982) and Stanford (1984) have reported that television audiences rarely distinguish between programming and the medium itself.

The medium of newspaper has provided stronger support for the three distinctions, but this support also has been mixed. Two studies supported both surveillance and diversion, but produced two slightly different forms of personal identity labelled stimulation (Lain, 1985) and interaction (Towers 1985b). However, when the latter study was replicated, only two dimensions emerged: an entertainment dimension incorporating diversion; and, an

information dimension combining both surveillance and personal identity (Towers 1986).

Finally, the medium of radio, which Snow (1983) pointed out is highly ritualistic for adults because of its relation to daily work routines like automotive commuting, produced a wide array of findings. Houghton-Larsen (1982) studied 320 Canadian undergraduates using Q-sort technique and found that radio was used for music, companionship, and informational content such as weather, time, and news. These findings supported Blumler's (1979) triad, with music reflecting diversion; companionship reflecting personal identity; and, informational content reflecting surveillance.

However, Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1984) found that 357 undergraduates in the Southwestern United States primarily related radio to the single dimension of killing time. Further, when Towers (1985a) studied the radio listenership of 543 adults in terms of the triad, only two dimensions emerged: diversion and a combination of surveillance and interaction. Oddly, the medium presumed to be ritualistic had produced a wide array of discrepancies among its findings.

Given these discrepancies in which gratifications could range from a single dimension of killing time through two dimensions (surveillance-interaction and diversion) to three dimensions (surveillance, diversion, personal identity), additional research was required. Such research needed to examine the medium of radio in depth, and to incorporate measurements that would permit cross-media comparisons. Since Towers (1986) had demonstrated that replication was effective in refining insights related to newspaper gratifications, and since a similar study had already been conducted for radio (Towers 1985a), a simple replication study was conducted to test the hypothesis that:

H_1: Gratifications statements related to radio usage will produce similar and stable patterns, reflecting highly ritualistic orientations toward the medium.

Note that the study did not attempt to measure ritual, but only to detect symptoms of stable orientations that can be associated with ritual.

Method

During Spring 1982, a telephone survey of 557 adults was conducted in the same large urban area of the Western United States with the same random digit dialing (RDD) techniques used by Towers (1985a) during Fall 1981. For this parallel but independent sample, the same questions were asked concerning demographics, media usage, and reactions to a selection of 14 uses and gratifications statements. Note that these 14 statements represented a collection expected to reflect Blumler's (1979) triad of surveillance, diversion, and interaction, as well as some unique statements to make additional factor groupings technically possible (Towers, 1985a, p. 173; 1986, pp. 23-24).

Replies to the fourteen uses and gratifications statements were coded from one for strongly disagree through five for strongly agree for a five point range of replies: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neutral-no opinion; (4) agree; (5) strongly agree. This coding permitted the replies to be treated as approximately interval data for subsequent analysis and exactly imitates the approach used in the initial study.

For the sake of convenience, the initial Fall 1981 sample will be called Sample I, and the following Spring 1982 sample will be called Sample II.

Results

Analysis of the data attempted to accomplish two goals: first, to establish the stability of radio-related gratifications themselves; and, second, to allow for the possibility of program selection producing discrepancies in radio usage.

First goal. To accomplish the first goal, a confirmatory factor analysis (Williams, 1986, p. 182) was used to determine if the 14 statements would reproduce the expected dimensions of surveillance-interaction and diversion.

Since the principal components method of factor analysis used on Sample I had provided some information about expected relationships among the statements, the mathematically more powerful technique of principal factors could be used on Sample II data. In the principal factors approach, the unities in the diagonal of the initial correlation matrix are replaced with estimates of the expected communalities between each variable and the expected factors (Harman, 1967, pp. 21-23; 136-143). For this analysis, the calculated communalities reported in Towers (1985a, p. 174) were used to replace the unities in the main diagonal for Sample II.

Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows the solution of a principal factors, varimax orthogonal rotation factor analysis for Sample II. This solution accounted for 50.4% of the total variance. The two factor groupings of surveillance-interaction and diversion were reproduced as expected, with only minor reordering of the variables within loadings, and with no shifting of statements from one set of loadings to another. Since some differences were evident, Sample II's replicated grouping of surveillance-interaction was renamed <u>information</u> while the diversion grouping was renamed <u>entertainment</u> to reflect those differences and to highlight their similarity to the principal factors groupings produced for newspaper (Towers, 1986, p. 64). Alpha reliability of the information factor was 0.822, and the entertainment factor reached 0.809.

Second goal. The study's second goal was to determine if allowing for relationships among uses and gratifications statements and radio listenership behaviors would show the same relative stability as the factor analysis. Such stability would be characteristic of a strongly ritualistic relation to the media.

As with the factor analysis above, discriminant analysis can be made more powerful by using prior knowledge of the variables involved. For this analysis, the variables retained as

significant by the equations presented in relation to Sample I (Towers 1985a, p. 178) were re-examined using Sample II data. This approach meant that the initial solutions were treated as descriptive, while the re-testing of those equations could be regarded as predictive (Towers, 1986, p. 65).

Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows the discriminant analyses that resulted when the selected descriptive variables of Sample I were related to radio in terms of Sample II data. The radio variables used were: hours listened during the morning (6am-12noon) and afternoon (12noon-6pm); amount of attention paid to radio programs; and, helpfulness of radio news. The relative strengths of these relations are shown by canonical correlation loadings, whose range from plus to minus one, with zero as a midpoint, make them easier to interpret than centroids and unstandardized weights (Towers, 1985a, 1985b, 1986).

Even cursory examination of Table 2 indicated that the predictive relations among the variables for Sample II were different than the descriptive relations for Sample I. Because of these discrepancies, each of the four solutions related to Sample II required re-examination.

Discussion

In general, many consistencies persisted across both data sets. Perceived helpfulness of radio news was most consistent, followed by hours listened in the morning and afternoon. Attention paid to radio produced the widest array of discrepancies.

Helpfulness. In terms of perceived helpfulness of radio news, only three of the seven gratification statements from Sample I's descriptive solution (Towers, 1985a, pp. 176; 178) persisted in Sample II's predictive solution, but the relationships between the independent and dependent variables remained consistent.

As shown in column four of Table 2, finding radio news very (.45) or somewhat (.11) helpful remained related to "Get immediate knowledge of big news events" (.96) and "Get exciting, dramatic

and entertaining news" (.34). Additionally, neutral/no opinion (-.27) and finding radio news not too (-.69) or not at all (-.36) helpful remained related to "Be entertained" (-.61). These consistencies meant that persons favoring radio news accented its informational aspects of immediate and exciting news, while persons not favoring radio news stressed the notion of radio as entertainment.

Hours listened: morning. Although Sample II data retained only three of the expected seven statements (Towers, 1985a, pp. 175; 178), most of the relations between the remaining statements and hours spent listening to morning radio remained consistent.

As shown in column one of Table 2, morning listening of one (.10), two (.11), or three (.24) hours remained related to "Be entertained" (1.09), while listening under an hour (-.19) continued to stress "Improve the quality of my lifestyle" (-.84). The only shifting was the move of persons listening over four hours (-.25) from being entertained on Sample I to improving lifestyle on Sample II.

The over four hours and under one hour morning listeners were different, however, in their endorsements of the lifestyle statement. Examination of the group means indicated that the over four hour listeners (group mean = 3.32) were more likely to agree (agree = 4; strongly agree = 5) with radio improving their lifestyle than were under one hour listeners (mean = 2.98). This difference meant that persons listening to morning radio for over four hours were likely to view radio as lifestyle enhancing, that intermediate listeners continued to stress entertainment, and that under an hour listeners downplayed radio's role in enhancing their lifestyles.

Hours listened: afternoon. For afternoon radio, only three of the expected five statements (Towers, 1985a, pp. 175; 178) remained, but they stayed relatively consistent.

Column two of Table 2 shows that listening to afternoon radio for three (-.11) and four or more (-.26) hours remained related to

"Get immediate knowledge of big news events" (-1.09), listening for one (.19) or two (.01) hours stayed related to "Be entertained" (.30). The key difference was that listening for one or two hours shifted from immediacy for Sample I to "Keep me informed about my local community" (1.07) for Sample II, switching places with listening for under an hour (-.04), which moved from local to immediate news.

These findings meant that both the heaviest and lightest listeners stressed the immediacy of radio news, while intermediate listeners stressed its localness. The higher group means for three (mean = 3.75) and four (4.00) hour listeners meant that they agreed more with radio's immediacy than under an hour listeners (3.52). These differences indicated relative acceptance of the importance of radio's immediacy by the heavy listeners, and its rejection by the lightest listeners. Overall, these findings meant that heavier listeners stressed immediacy, intermediate listeners stressed localness and entertainment, and light listeners were relatively indifferent to the immediacy of afternoon radio.

Attention paid. By far, the greatest number of discrepancies involved the amount of attention usually paid to radio. The number of retained statements reduced to five from the expected nine (Towers, 1985a, pp. 175-176; 178), and several changes in the relationships among the variables occured.

In terms of consistencies between Sample I and Sample II findings, examination of column three of Table 2 indicated that listening to specific programs (.19) and not listening much at all (.21) continued to be related to "Get immediate knowledge of big news events" (.96). Listening when attention was attracted (-.37) stayed related to "By being my friend when I am alone" (-.63), while using radio for background noise (.25) stayed with "Find products through advertising" (.29). Finally, paying close attention to all programming (-.15) remained related to "Find issues affecting people like myself" (-.35).

These consistencies were complicated, however, by several shiftings in relationships between the gratifications statements and attention paid to radio. First, in addition to remaining related to immediate news in Sample II, listening to specific programs (.19) and not listening much at all (.21) also related to finding products through advertising (.29). Next, listening if attention attracted (-.39) added finding important issues (-.35) to its entertainment orientations of passing time and companionship.

Additionally, this change was mirrored by the flipflop of two patterns of attention paid to radio. Paying close attention (-.15) flipped over to the entertainment orientations of passing time and companionship, while using radio for background noise (.25) flopped over to the informational notions of immediate news and advertised products.

The flipflopping meant that the informational immediacy of radio news was important to the selective listeners of specific programs, unselective listeners using radio for background noise, and persons not listening much at all. Alternatively, attentive listeners, whether intentional or attracted, preferred the entertainment aspects of companionship and passing time. Overall, these findings meant that persons attentive to radio stressed its entertainment aspects, while persons selective or indifferent to the medium accented its immediacy.

Conclusions

As before (Towers, 1985a, p. 176), the Sample II data reaffirmed that the two dimensions of information based on surveillance-interaction and entertainment based on diversion underlie perceptions regarding the radio medium. Further, the data accented the importance of informational notions like immediate news, and entertainment notions like simply being entertained, in explaining radio-related behaviors.

Because of the discrepancies between the descriptive findings of Sample I and the predictive findings of Sample II, the question of which insights should be pre-emptive remained. Fortunately,

resolution can be found in the levels of correct classification shown in Table 2. In each case, the level of correctness related to all four radio variables improved notably for Sample II. Correct classification for hours listened in the morning rose from 29.7% to 41.1%; for afternoon listening from 29.8% to 36.7%; for attention paid from 33.6% to 41.6%; and, for helpfulness of radio news from 40.1% to 45.6%. In general, replication increased the predictive capability of each relationship while reducing the number of variables involved.

Based on the second set of findings then, radio audiences stressed entertainment in the morning, while accenting local news in the afternoon. Positive orientations toward radio news were based on its immediacy. Such findings should not be regarded as unshakable, however. Despite improvements in correct classification, levels of significance dropped from the .01-level on Sample I to .05 for morning and .10 for afternoon listening on Sample II. Such weakenings highlight the notion that much work remains in this area. Also, although the levels of correct classification increased, they did not even reach halfway to 100% correct classification. Finally, the extreme instability related to attention paid to radio indicates the need for greater refinement in that area.

In terms of radio as ritual, the relative consistency of the findings indicated a stability symptomatic of ritualized behavior. Although the behavior was not monotonic, it appeared sufficiently stable to accept the hypothesis with the acknowledgement that the regularity is symptomatic of ritual but not necessarily ritualistic. However, the relative instability of some findings indicated that much work remains. Radio listening has aspects of ritual, but the ritual appears to be rich, complex, and worthy of further exploration.

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Table 1

Factor Analysis of Uses and Gratifications Statements Applied to the Radio Medium: Second Sample (II)

	Factor(s):		Communality:	
	I	II	(Estimated)	(Calculated)
Information grouping:				
Get information to pass on to other people (SI)	.76	.07	(.60)	(.58)
Understand what is going on (SI)	.73	.03	(.59)	(.53)
Get more information on things I've seen such as movies, sports events or accidents (SI)	.70	.12	(.46)	(.50)
Find interesting or unusual stories that I can tell to others (SI)	.69	.20	(.53)	(.52)
Get exciting, dramatic and entertaining news (SI)	.68	.11	(.56)	(.48)
Find issues affecting people like myself (SI)	.66	.08	(.49)	(.44)
Keep me informed about what is happening in my local community (SI)	.64	.06	(.50)	(.42)
Get immediate knowledge of big news events (SI)	.60	.12	(.41)	(.37)
Improve the quality of my lifestyle (SI)	.49	.21	(.30)	(.28)
Find products through advertisements (SI)	.38	.26	(.32)	(.21)
Entertainment grouping:				
Be happy (D)	.15	.74	(.56)	(.57)
Be entertained (D)	.15	.63	(.40)	(.42)
By being my friend when I am alone (D)	.10	.60	(.46)	(.37)
Just pass the time (D)	.02	.56	(.32)	(.32)
Eigenvalue(s):	5.1	2.0		
Percent of variance:	36.1%	14.3%		
Cumulative percent:	36.1%	50.4%		
Alpha reliability:	.82	.81		

KEY: Sample I factors: (SI) = Surveillance-Interaction; (D) = Diversion

Table 2

Summary of Predictive Discriminant Variables

for Radio Listening: Second Sample (II)

RADIO VARIABLES:		Morning (6am-12n)	Afternoon (12n-6pm)	Attention Paid	Radio News: Helpfulness
Groups:*	First	-.18a	-.26a	-.15f	.45k
	Second	.24b	-.11b	.19g	.11l
	Third	.11c	.01c	.21h	-.27m
	Fourth	.10d	.19d	-.37i	-.69m
	Fifth	-.19e	-.04e	.25j	-.36o
GRATIFICATIONS VARIABLES:					
Be entertained (E)		1.09	.30	-----	-.61
Improve the quality of my lifestyle (I)		-.84	-----	-----	-----
Keep me informed about what is happening in my local community (I)		-----	1.07	-----	-----
Get immediate knowledge of big news events (I)		-----	-1.09	1.09	.96
Find products through advertisements (I)		-----	-----	.29	-----
By being my friend when I am alone (E)		-----	-----	-.63	-----
Find issues affecting people like myself (I)		-----	-----	-.35	-----
Just pass the time (E)		-----	-----	-.34	-----
Get exciting, dramatic and entertaining news (I)		-----	-----	-----	.34
Eigenvalue(s):		.03	.02	.07	.13
Canonical correlation:		.16	.15	.25	.34
Wilks' lambda:		.97	.96	.91	.87
Chi-square goodness-of-fit:		18.6(8)	20.9(12)	54.1(20)	73.9(12)
(degrees of freedom)					
p <		.05	.10	.01	.01
Correctly classified:					
Sample II (predictive):		41.1%	36.7%	41.6%	45.6%
Sample I (descriptive):		29.7%	29.8%	33.6%	40.1%
Simple chance:		20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%

KEY: Sample II factors: (E) = Entertainment; (I) = Information

Table 2

(continued)

*Footnotes:

a Listened 4 to 6 hours daily.

b Listened 3 hours to 3 hours 59 minutes daily.

c Listened 2 hours to 2 hours 59 minutes daily.

d Listened 1 hour to 1 hour 59 minutes daily.

e Listened less than one hour daily.

f Close attention to all programming.

g Listen to specific programs.

h Don't listen much at all.

i Listen when attention attracted.

j Use for background noise.

k Very helpful.

l Somewhat helpful.

m Neutral/no opinion.

n Not too helpful.

o Not at all helpful.